

About ∨ Art ∨ Projects Blog ∨ Shop

<< Back

## Immanentise the E-girl

Critique, Culture, Pop culture - April 05, 2021 - Moselle K.



I became interested in playing and tried to stop thinking about holding in my stomach, but every time I thought I was so brilliant, like taking his queen on the fourth move, I'd lose.

Eve Babitz, age twenty, was on birth control the day she entered the Pasadena Art Museum, took off her clothes, and sat down to play chess with a small mouse of a man named Marcel Duchamp. With Babitz preoccupied with holding in her stomach, Duchamp —avant-garde artist and chess enthusiast—swiftly won. In a way, Babitz triumphed too, according to photographs of the match that helped to canonise this very story, as part of both Duchamp's and Babitz's personal mythologies. The famous portraits of the pair at play were taken by Babitz's sister's boyfriend, photojournalist Julian Wasser, to win back the attention of her erstwhile (married) beau, Walter Hopps, curator of Duchamp's 1963 Pasadena retrospective. Despite Babitz's displeasure with her hormonal body (a 'blimp' with 'two pink footballs for breasts', she [later wrote](#)), Hopps embraced her. Her queen's gambit worked, but only because she had lost.

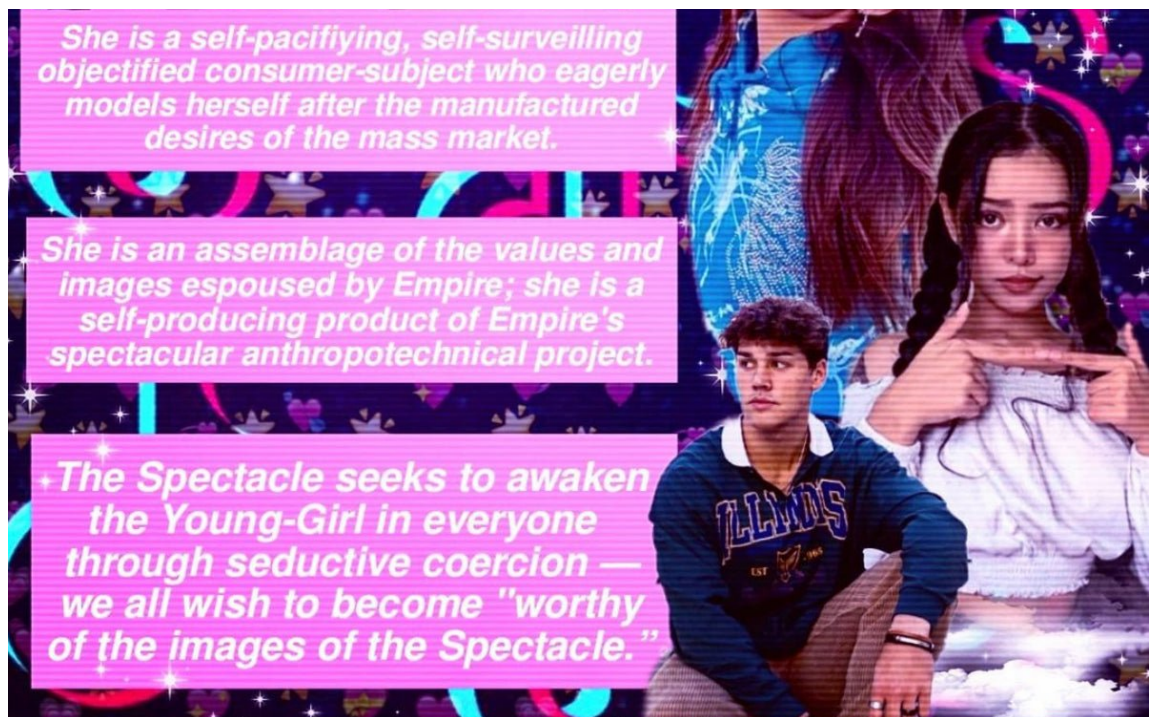
Wasser pictures Babitz and Duchamp seated before the Duchamp artwork Large Glass (1915–1923), also known as ‘The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors Even’. The piece consists of a windowpane with intricate detail and multifarious meanings, to which Hopps’ exhibition brought Hollywood acclaim, ballasted by Babitz’s exposure. Babitz was stripped by Wasser, Hopps, and Duchamp, through what she noted as a ‘great contrast; this large, too-LA surfer girl with an extremely tiny old man in a French suit’. What comes alive in these images is Eve as avatar, Eve as e-girl. Here were her underlings, her sheepish simps, watching her, yet hers to control.

Babitz was not just a woman, but an experience, as one might say of any e-girl who disrobes before an audience (metaphorically, and otherwise.) To bare herself, to bride among bachelors, was to test the safety valve of vulnerability as affect, amply protected, whether by money or her sheer endurance, that she could lose—at least, lose her clothes—without sustaining loss. It is not Babitz’s face that stares back at us from Wasser’s photographs, hidden behind her cropped hair, but, in corporeal revelation, her look.

As an origin point for the Internet entity who goes by ‘e-girl’, Babitz portended several of the genre’s key ingredients. From her, we learn a basic fact—the e-girl succeeds when her footing only seems uneven. The e-girl plays against old masters (accounts with large followings, her elders), not to beat them, but to alert the gaggle of ‘reply guys’ who trail after her and pile on to her grievances. If her display neutralises the competition, it is with benign neglect or bemused support from her ‘podcaster boyfriend’, her IRLs, and the parents she lives with. The e-girl builds her web by ingratiating a community of patron-admirers with perseverative commentary. As online as she is, much of the information she divulges must be cyclically deleted or anonymised.

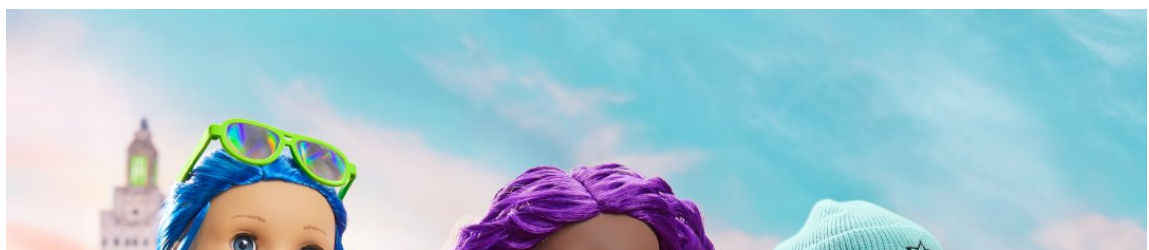
What distinguishes the e-girl confessional from the content provision of the Instagram influencer is her aversion to selling anything but emotional ambrosias—[kratom leaves](#) and [Vyvanse](#), angel numbers and macarons. The lifestyle guru recommends rituals and regimens with an apathetic remoteness from their ‘users’. The e-girl, on the other hand, speaks from within the act itself—as she takes today’s dose of mirror selfies, lights some Yankee candles, sips on [crème brûlée juul](#)—‘[dissolving the margins](#)’ between her domain and her viewer’s. ‘[Quirked up](#)’, the e-girl puts the hyper back in hyperstition, a shorty so perfumed in the world’s energies you mistake your own scent for her intimacy. Indeed the e-girl’s [parasocial](#) properties are what compelled the members of French philosophy journal *Tiqqun* to crown the adolescent feminine phenom a ‘gazing machine’ in their by now classic text, *Preliminary Materials for a Theory of the Young-Girl* (2001). The Young-Girl is just as gaseous as the e-girl, but with a generational purview of X and Y, not Z. Composed just before 9/11, in near anticipation of the epochal e-girl idiom that the attacks would forge, *Preliminary Materials* imputes to the Young-Girl a preeminent position in the ‘fractalised battlefield’ of culture, war, and capital that has only metastasised amidst subsequent geopolitical turmoil.





There is a [conscious](#) but as yet under-theorised relationship between Tiquun's analysis of this original girl-wonder and her current iteration in Tik-Tok and Twitter-verses. Trading 'Young' for 'e', we can apply their polemic's more obvious valuations—'The Young-Girl is old already insofar as she knows herself to be young'—and leave out what no longer resonates. If Preliminary Materials can help illuminate what 'girl' 'represents', 'e' means a lot of things—ecstasy, Equinox, Thomas Aquinas, evite, Evian water, Animal Crossing, Animal Farm. The compounded 'e-girl' has been applied liberally: [Doja Cat](#) is an e-girl, [Ella Emhoff](#) is an e-girl. [Cruella](#), with her two-toned hair, is an e-girl. Susan Sarandon is an e-girl? The Euphoria makeup, reanimated on the visages of thousands of teenagers across the vast scape of Internet country, is extra-virgin oil e-girl. Tamagotchi, teletubby, electronic g-string. 'e' for everybody's little sister. 'e' for e-cigarettes, ether, eat her.

She used to be easier to digest. The quintessential e-girl of 2019 and earlier was the goth-tinged [gamine](#), an actual or metaphorical Twitch-streaming cosplayer-poet with Japanophilic proclivities. Alice, with the Internet her wonderland. To become her, according to [one TikTok meme](#), you could drink 'rapid transformation juice', pass through an 'e-girl factory', clasp at your neck to simulate self-destruction, change your makeup (pencil hearts beneath the eyes) or your hairdo (split-colour wig). In the Covidian turn towards complete virtual existence, the formula for e-girl metamorphosis became dilute and permeable. If Tiquun had already established that the Young-Girl had no set age or gender, the e-girl stipulates that whomever She is must be contained within her bedroom, dispatching her aphorisms at a remove from all other avenues of socialisation. 'In the final analysis, the Young-Girl's ideal is domestic'. Digital domesticity is the e-girl's beginning, her real, and her anticipated [future](#). The e-girl is canonised by the glow of her [lava lamp](#), as she snuggles in with [a giant teddy bear](#), no less than four pastel-shaded beverages, an unread Pynchon book.







In fashion and adjacent media, the e-girl's rise has been heralded with belated, mildly confused [style guides](#) that crosswire her signals instead of mapping their movement. 'At the moment when the evidence for the Young-Girl is so obvious it becomes a cliché, the Young-Girl is already transcended...' Transcendence renders the e-girl alluring and immediate, reminding us that in the great American landscape that is the English-language Internet, objects in the mirror may be closer than they appear. Yet unlike the online aughts, for which ['you had to be there'](#), close access to the e-girl entails a begrudging respect for her [evasiveness](#), her intermittent exits, 'chaos spirals', and poaster's reclusion (TL churning, DMs ignored). Every third e-girl calls herself [Eris](#), goddess of Discord and war. She is innocent and spiteful, never wholly lucid, never not bored. With ['reckless punctuation'](#) and Ravel in her AirPods, she answers the dullest of provocateurs with variably saccharine or icy retorts. Dancing between sugar and spice, 'The Young-Girl's not supposed to understand you' but the e-girl will anyway. 'I love you alive girl', Jeff Bezos texts her. Left on read, no response. 'I will show you...very soon'. Double hearts. ♡♡

Even when the e-girl's office is open, there is still the sense that her identity is gatekept, password protected. This impression derives from the residual hallmark of her Tumblr antecedent, whose aura of Pain and Sadness, Safy-Hallan Farah recently [observed](#), formed the 'soul contract' tying together 'all the so-called fail-daughters' of Girls-era white Brooklyn. Even if New York is still on her radar, the e-girl does not need it: her abjection is less traceable, her demographic origins intentionally obscure. The e-girl's digitisation of aura is seamless, as she subsumes vestiges of external sociality into virtual (dis)order. It is easy to want in on this, for those of us (most of us) who see catharsis in her maelstrom. Many ask, ['Can I be one yet?'](#), others promise, ['e-girl soon'](#). Tiqqun: 'The

Young-Girl is crazy about the authentic because it's a lie'. 'The Young-Girl is a lie, the apogee of which is her face'. The e-girl demands her cosmetic signatures be tabulated, that we count her ornamental [eye-bags](#), bandaged doe-nose, striped stockings, miniskirts, and platform boots as proof of her loyalty—very cute. Loyalty to what, exactly? Her ever-evolving array of accessories can trace their familiarity to prior vanguards of indie and anime subcultures. Yet the e-girl is more capacious ethic than singular aesthetic in her hold on female-coded online personas. Her single law is a decked-out [ScreenTime rubric](#); receipts for her rigorous work.

Two creased Ls make a W, and trying something in public, particularly the internet's synthetic public, is a good way to get good at it. The e-girl is a portal to BEING BEST, Honor Levy [argues](#), and the TikTok teenagers concur. Seeking to discover their preferred style, they cycle through the e-girl's [first](#), because, stamped out with black heart and metal chain emojis, it provides a seal of hard-core effort. As Andrea Long Chu [told us](#) in 2019, the ethic of females is something like 'commitment to a bit.' As far as her own narrative goes, the e-girl is nothing if not devoted. Being herself by baring herself is a job like any other, and she [knows it](#).



This was true, for instance, of artist and philosopher Adrian Piper, whose 'e' was Immanuel Kant. In the summer of 1971, age 23, Piper entered a semi-quarantine. She retreated into her New York loft, fasting, doing yoga, and reading Kant's Critique of Pure Reason, in which she became totally absorbed. Disassociating (as an e-girl does) from her material environment, she traded linear time for Kantian Being-time, an immersion so intense Piper started to wonder if she even existed. In answer, she began Food for the Spirit, an artwork for which she chanted excerpts from Kant's text while taking snapshots of herself undressed before her mirror, documenting her body as it became increasingly slivered. As Piper explained: 'every time the fear of losing myself overtook me and drove me to the 'reality check' of the mirror, I was able to both record my physical appearance objectively and also record myself on tape repeating the passage in Critique that was currently driving me to self-transcendence'—to an exalted escape. 'I'm rawdogging reality right now', [the e-girl says](#). We see her photos, so we believe her.

Reality, the same e-girl [reports](#), is a candied purgatory of visual pleasure and ambient roiling to enjoy before its next stage, extinction. The e-girl expects explosion; she is one with catastrophe. In her late 2010s high school history class, she watched a mushroom cloud bellow over a child picking petals in [‘Daisy’](#), the ad from Lyndon B. Johnson’s 1964 presidential campaign, and mumbled, [‘it me.’](#) When Johnson warns, ‘We must either love each other, or we must die,’ so long as she [has her archive](#), the e-girl is down for either.



Ciara Horan, Hipster Crona Eats a Croissant, 60fps 2176x1440

9 views • Mar 22, 2021

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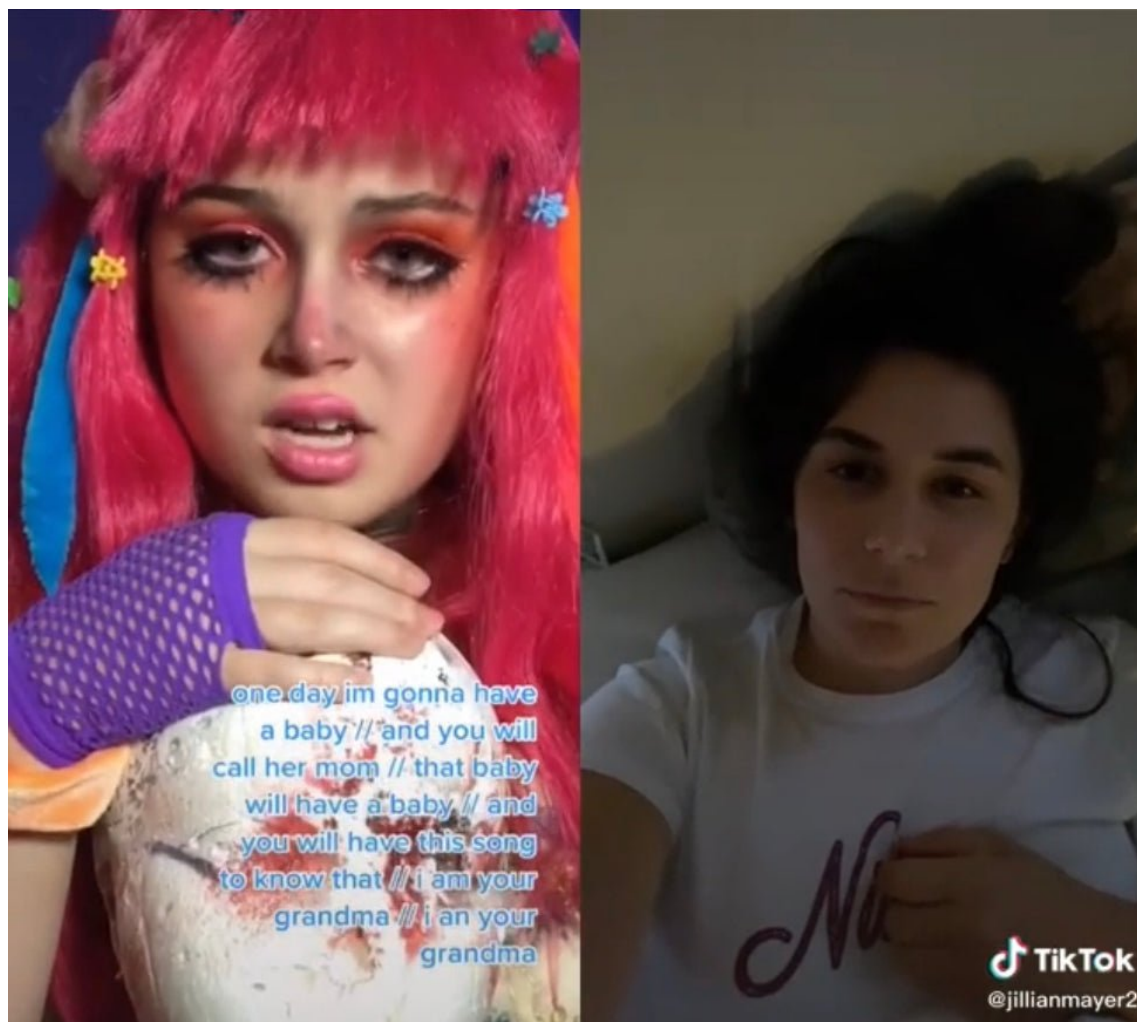
Logged on, the e-girl dies a thousand little deaths a day at the hands of the thousand clowns who chase her. With these jokers at her feet, like [Daphne](#), she is reborn but guised in leaves. Resurfacing on private alts or burner accounts, the e-girl zombie seeds questions to disturb her own peace. ‘The Young-Girl never creates anything; she re-creates herself’. This is true for anemic androgyne Ciara Horan as much as it is for ultra-femme Belle Delphine. Their respective vanishings—for the latter, a [momentary respite](#); for the former, [ongoing](#)—were termed ‘fake’ and called out for trickery. Really, they are nothing but her guile, her Genius, her [Ovidian](#) legacy (it is no accident that one of the e-girl’s most successful ambassadors goes by [‘Xepher Wolf’](#)). [There she goes, there she goes again](#): as Soph tweets, Albertine tells us, and Lenu shows us, the surest—[not the saddest](#)—thing a girl can do to stay ‘alive’ is disappear.

‘Why must the Young-Girl always feign some activity or other? In order to remain impregnable in her passivity’. There is one other thing she could do, the very thing Babitz was pilloried to prevent: she [could have a child](#).

One day, I'm gonna have a baby! And you will call her mom. And the baby will have a baby and you will have this song to know that I AM YOUR GRANDMA. I am your GRANDMA...I am your grandma...



In 2011, Jillian Mayer, age 25 or 27, made a [one-minute video](#) dedicated to her unborn grandchild. In it, Mayer dons various absurdist costumes as a robotic edit of her voice rings out with the above message. Uploaded to YouTube, I Am Your Grandma became a viral sensation, minted by museums and [KnowYourMeme](#) as a paragon of popular Net Art (still rare in the age before NFTs). As Mayer explains in the description, the project was an exercise in ‘why people share their personal feelings with anonymous strangers,’ questioning how its viewership might impact the emotional pitch of her work’s message.



33 weeks ago, in the summer of 2020, Mayer began a new series, [Infinity Loop](#), in which she watches adolescents on TikTok reenact her performance in I Am Your Grandma using the original audio track. Each girl—for it is almost always girls—enunciates the words with her own invented gestures that bear little resemblance to Mayer’s original, as the artist looks on, from her car or her couch, with a blank and sullen expression. The vatic power of I am Your Grandma had prematurely aged the young Net artist into an e-girl grandmother. Surrendering her work to a mass audience, stripped by her bachelors, what she lost lives on, with its spawn playing along.

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